Bible Characters – Ruth
(Book of Ruth)

At first glance, the Book of Ruth is similar to a common love story. Yet, as we look more carefully, we see the importance of obedience, faith, and loyalty in the life of Ruth. This is well expressed in her relationships with others, foremost, her mother-in-law, Naomi, and as the events unfold, in her relationship with Boaz, a relative of Naomi. Nevertheless, what stands out the most is her personal relationship with God in surrender and obedience – leaving all the consequences to Him.

Right from the start we learn about the challenges both Ruth and Naomi face, since, not only do Naomi's husband and sons die (Ruth 1:3-5), but also Ruth's own husband. In addition, Ruth is left childless at the time and also has to decide on leaving her familiar cultural Moabite environment – due to the end of the famine in Judah – joining Naomi on an uncertain journey moving to Bethlehem in Judah as a foreigner. While Ruth's sister-in-law decides to turn back to Moab, loyal Ruth insists to stay with her mother-in-law, emphasized in her words – when she says: "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" (Ruth 1:16-17 NLT).

Upon returning to Bethlehem, Ruth then follows Naomi's advice and remains obedient as she meets Boaz in the grain field (Ruth 2). In this chapter we see the initiation of her relationship with Boaz, which reaches a peak in the following chapter – when Ruth risks all she has, as she secretly confronts Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:9-11). Hereafter, God works mightily in the hearts and lives of others to ensure that Boaz becomes the kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4:1-12). Not only that, but God also enables the newlyweds to have a child (Ruth 4:13). Remarkably, as a result of God's sovereignty, Ruth, Boaz and their child – Obed – become ancestors of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). What we learn here is how God often operates behind the scenes on behalf of those who honour Him and He works things out, when we (like Ruth) have nowhere else to turn to.

In sum, we see in Ruth an example of faith and obedience, encouraging us to surrender to God especially, in time of hardship and suffering. As seen Ruth's faith is expressed well in her relationship with other people and with God. Her obedience, loyalty and faithfulness remind us of our own need and dependence on God. While it may not always appear or feel that way – we serve a loving and personal God who cares about us. We know this, since as we turn to Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour, He has redeemed us already, both now and for all eternity.

For further study:

Gardner P. *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters: The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

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